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**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Chapter 1 Summary

Laura Chase is killed instantly in a car accident. Laura's sister must go to the morgue to identify the body, and readers are given an idea of the woman Laura's sister is. She is careful, deliberate, and knows that she must dress appropriately in case newspaper reporters are nearby. She must do anything fitting her position as the wife of Mr. Richard E. Griffen. Especially since the car in which Laura Chase died belonged to Mrs. Richard E. Griffen.

Laura's sister decides to wear black, of course, and she must also wear gloves, a veil, and should bring a handkerchief. When Laura's sister opens a drawer in her dressing room, she comes across a stack of school examination notebooks that have been bound in kitchen string. When she lifts the notebooks out, the shock of Laura's death hits her.

Chapter 2 Summary Sub-Novel

There are two main characters in the sub-novel: the man and woman. Clandestine meetings occur between them and the relationship is in its infancy. The woman is described as "nervous. She is married but he is single. Details are dropped into the narrative like toppings on an ice cream sundae - the color of the woman's dress, the kind of tree that sits outside her bedroom window - and these things will be clues to the identities of the man and woman later on. Additionally, news clips, interspersed between vignettes, keep readers on a linear time path with the main novel. Also in this chapter are stories within stories. The woman and man meet several times and in varied places: over lunch, in a park, at night under a bridge.

Chapter 3 Summary Main Novel

It is June, 1998 and Iris Chase Griffen is about to present the Laura Chase Creative Writing Award to a graduating senior at Port Ticonderoga High School. Readers get to know Iris a bit better throughout the narrative. The death of her sister Laura, which she describes as being as close to suicide as the word damn is to swearing, is an old wound that still bleeds. Her representation of the Chase family in the presentation of this monetary award is very difficult for her.

Iris reminisces about her sister's life, how the story in the sub-novel created a town furor worthy of book banning, and how Iris has withstood the worst of this upset for the past 50 years. Yet, Laura is also seen as a genius taken in the prime of her life - a genius that Iris wears like a hair shirt.

Chapter 4 Summary Sub-Novel

The man and woman continue to meet in secret. At a cafe, she is uncomfortable because of the part of town in which it is located, and he is uncomfortable with the "fancy" way she is dressed.

Their togetherness, for him, is about sex; their togetherness, for her, is about what is missing in her marriage: love and respect. The two of them leave the cafe and go to a room he is borrowing from a friend. It is threadbare, worn, and shabby. The woman is again uncomfortable in this environment but is so needy for what the man can give her that she stays. They make love and he continues telling her the science-fiction tale about the residents of Sakiel-Norn. In another instance, at another time, the man and woman meet in a friend's apartment where they again make love, and again, he continues telling the story.

Chapter 5 Summary Main Novel

This chapter volleys between present-day and the mid-1920s through the late 1930s in the history of the Chase family. Readers are permitted the chance to know Iris as an old woman and also get to know how Iris came to be that old woman. It is 1925 and Lilia Chase has died after the premature birth of her third child. Iris is saddled with caring for Laura and knows that it is going to be a full-time job. Even though Reenie acts in a motherly fashion toward both girls, it is Iris who tends to Laura's everyday needs. They must be each other's best friend, because they are not permitted to go off the grounds of Avilion alone.

It is during this time that Iris tries to figure out why her mother died as well as how to explain to Laura what happened to the "unfinished" baby t

Chapter 6 Summary Sub-Novel

The man and woman continue to meet in a variety of borrowed places: a dingy room, an opulent apartment and a janitor's storeroom in the basement of a building. The woman is clearly out of her element and comments so to herself while she goes to meet the man. She feels out of place in body and spirit: her clothes are too fancy, her walk is too refined and her attitude is too uptown for the downtown surroundings.

However, she clearly loves this man, or certainly loves the image of him. He tries to appear nonchalant, but even he grows restless when he thinks she is not coming to meet him. Theirs is a relationship that starts out purely physical but melds into one of need. In addition, as the book continues, readers are left to wonder who this woman is: Laura or Iris?

Chapter 7 Summary Main Novel

More of Iris's mystery begins to unravel with the opening of Chapter 7. She possesses a steamer trunk - one from her 1935 honeymoon trip to Europe with Richard Griffen - full of handwritten text and a couple of first edition books.

It is hinted that Laura wrote these, but the question does arise: did Iris actually write stories, including the sub-novel? Many have written to Iris in hopes of interviewing her about her dead sister but she has steadfastly refused. She keeps the existence and contents of the steamer trunk a secret from the world. On a trip into Toronto to see her lawyer, Iris asks Walter to drive her past her old home - the one she shared with Richard as a newly married woman. It is still there, and now has tendrils of ivy fingering up the brickwork.

Chapter 8 Summary Sub-Novel

The man and woman continue meeting and telling each other stories. They debate over the ending of the story of the blind assassin and the tongueless girl. The woman wants a happy ending, where the two will live out their years together; the man would like to see everyone, including the lovers, annihilated. The storytelling between the man and woman is intellectual foreplay. At another rendezvous, the man tells a nicer story, at the urging of the woman. It is about the Lizard Men of Xenor and their coupling with women of Earth to create a super race. The woman tells the man that she is going away on the maiden voyage cruise of the Queen Mary. It is becoming clearer that the woman is Iris Griffen.

Chapter 9 Summary Main Novel

The elderly Iris is losing the battle all older people fight: to maintain independence at home. Iris's mind is still sharp but her body is letting her down. She cannot even do her own laundry in the basement without fearing she will fall and be hurt. Elderly Iris is also fighting off the ministrations of Myra who dotes on her as though she inherited her from her mother, Reenie. Myra means well but smothers Iris all the same. Her latest idea is to hire someone to clean Iris's house and do laundry for her.

However, Iris does not want a stranger touching her underwear. It is the spring of 1936; the Civil War had begun in Spain, King Edward had abdicated the throne for the Duchess of Windsor, and Laura had headed off to school.

Chapter 10 Summary Sub-Novel

The woman misses the man desperately and looks high and low for some sign of him; something to tell her that he is safe. She finds their story, *The Lizard Men of Xenor*, in a newsstand at a train station. She secretly sneaks it home and cherishes it as though he were reaching his hand out to her and her alone.

Waiting for him to return from Spain seems interminable and, to pass the time, she imagines him imagining her. In her mind's eye, she sees him on trains, in stations and in diners. Her salvation is that he is on his way home to her, only her, and that he will soon emerge through the mist of a departing train to save her from her own life.

Chapter 11 Summary Main Novel

As the story progresses, readers are treated to little hints, tiny secrets here and there. Iris likes to visit the middle stall in the washroom of a local doughnut shop.

That is where the best graffiti is written (including some about Laura) — and where she would like to add some of her own. She checks into that stall regularly to see what has been written there, as one would get a weekly update to a news item. Laura was sent to a different school — same temperament, different uniform — and plans were laid by Winifred for Laura's debut the following year when she turned eighteen. Laura grudgingly attended school but hated it. Once Laura started to be a bigger burden than Winifred wanted Richard to bear, it was decided that Laura should be married.

Chapter 12 Summary Sub-Novel

The man returns from the war in Spain and is greeted at the train station by the woman. Because he has not yet rented a room, they go to a seedy hotel to be alone together after such a long time apart. The room in the hotel is the worst place they have ever been together. It smells bad, the furniture is tacky and ripped and there is no fresh air. She tells him that she found The Lizard Men of Xenor and waited, impatiently, for the next episode so that she knew he was all right. She had worried about him dying in the war, and he tells her that nearly happened.

Chapter 13 Summary Main Novel, the 1930s

Just before World War II, Iris' marriage to Richard was getting worse. She had suffered two miscarriages and learned that Richard had enjoyed his share of

mistresses. She assumed these dalliances were with his secretaries who were always very young and very pretty. They kept up marital appearances by going to parties and gatherings and Iris was grateful that Richard was no longer bothering her for marital obligations. Once World War II broke out, Richard and his business were in a bad place.

He had been too friendly with the Germans prior to the war and stood to lose a lot of money. Following the end of the war, Iris receives a call from Laura. Back in Toronto, Iris sees Laura at Diana Sweets, one of Iris's favorite shops.

Chapter 14 Summary Main Novel, the late 1940s

Iris finds old school exercise books after Laura dies. In the mathematics book, there appears a long column of numbers with words opposite some of them. Iris recognizes the numbers as dates. The first date coincides with Iris's return from Europe and the last day was just a few months before Laura was sent to Bella Vista.

Iris concludes that these are the dates Richard raped Laura. Iris was grateful that Laura had never seen Aimee because she would have known right away that Aimee was Alex Thomas's daughter and not Richard's. Iris keeps all of Laura's notebooks, bound together with string, plus other manuscript pages in the steamer trunk once used in her wedding trousseau. After Laura's funeral, Iris leaves Richard. She sends the steamer trunk out to Port Ticonderoga and then takes Aimee away while Richard is gone on business.

Chapter 15 Summary Sub-Novel

Iris is seen cherishing the photo of her and Alex Thomas at the Button Factory picnic that hot, humid Labor Day in the mid-1930s. The picture was

of happiness, but the ensuing story was not. Just before her death, Iris has one last daydream. It is of reuniting with Sabrina, one in which Sabrina does not blame her for her fate. Sabrina calls Iris, comes to her house and sits with her. On May 29, 1999, Iris Chase Griffen dies at the age of 83. Shortly thereafter, Sabrina returns from traveling abroad to see to her grandmother's affairs